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**League Has Significant Rivalries?**

**By Larry Woods**

The National Football League or the NFL is the biggest professional football league in the United

States. The NFL has thirty-two teams that are based in a variety of cities across the country. Originally known as the American Professional Football Association when it was formed in 1920, the Association assumed the name "National Football League" in 1922.

At first, the most popular way people enjoyed their football was by watching their favorite college team play but the focus of the country changed in 1958. That NFL game went into overtime and captured a number of new fans who found that they enjoyed the professional football league just as much as if not more than their college football teams. Due to the rising popularity of professional football, the NFL merged with the American Football League in the 1960's to form what is now the National Football League.

Over the years, some friendly and some not-so-friendly rivalries have come about due to a number of circumstances. These rivalries can be categorized into three separate groups. The first is the `intradivisional', which is a rivalry between teams in the same NFL division. The second is interdivisional, which is a rivalry between teams in the different divisions but in the same conference. The third is the `interconference', which is a rivalry between teams in different conferences. Many times fans will hear sportscasters refer to team rivalries as "divisional rivals", "division rival" or "conference rival" instead of including the appropriate prefix.

For example, in the AFC North, there is a rivalry between the Baltimore Ravens and the Cleveland Browns based on the when the team's owner, Art Modell, moved the Cleveland Browns franchise to Baltimore. Fortunately for Cleveland Browns fans, the "Dawg Pound" and its colors remained in Cleveland. The Cleveland Browns were reactivated as a NFL team in 1999. The "Dawg Pound" fans waited for their revenge and got a taste in 2001 when the Browns won against the Ravens after only four games.

Another famous rivalry began in the AFC East when the Buffalo Bills owner, Ralph Wilson, wasn't allowed to base an AFL team in Miami and went on to establish the Buffalo Bills as a charter member of the AFL. The Buffalo Bills and the Miami Dolphins have maintained a rivalry based on this history

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since 1967. This particular rivalry has had a number of key moments that continued to fuel their contention over the years including playing against each other in the ultimate game of the football season— the Super Bowl.

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### **Which Division Will Provide The Best Football Tickets In 2006?**

**By Jay Nault**

Even though we are entrenched in the NFL's "Age of Parity," fans around the league still want to know what they're getting when they buy their football tickets. As we look at the divisional breakdown, it becomes apparent that certain divisions are deeper than others. That's why we're going to break them down individually by way of "Divisional Power Rankings." These rankings could change throughout the season, but now is a good time to take our first look.

#### 1. NFC East

The NFC East, top-to-bottom, is the toughest division in football right now. Any one of the four teams could realistically qualify for the playoffs, and the final standings could shake out in just about any way and no one would be really surprised.

#### 2. NFC South

The NFC South contains a Super Bowl contender in the Panthers, two solid playoff-level teams in the Buccaneers and Falcons, and perhaps the most improved team in the league, the Saints. This division will be brutal, and the winner will definitely be battle-tested.

#### 3. AFC West

The AFC West is almost as difficult, as the Broncos have Super Bowl aspirations, the Chiefs are expected to at least make the playoffs, the Chargers are talented and the Raiders could be scary if they ever put all their talent together. The rivalries in this division also make every game a battle.

#### 4. AFC North

The AFC North contains the defending champions, and they didn't even win the division last year. The Bengals did, but they have question marks surrounding QB Carson Palmer and off-field distractions. Baltimore is much-improved and the Browns are getting better.

#### 5. AFC East

The East has the rivalries, but only two good teams in the Patriots and Dolphins. The Jets and Bills,

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whether they admit it or not, are rebuilding. Regardless, fans of every team are extremely loyal, so football tickets sales will be high for any of these divisional battles.

### 6. AFC South

The South contains one potential juggernaut in the Colts, one fringe playoff team in Jacksonville, and two teams in the Texans and Titans that are in full rebuild mode. The Colts–Jaguars games will be entertaining, but the Texans and Titans are definitely a notch below as of now.

### 7. NFC North

The NFC North has one established playoff team in the Bears, one likely playoff team in the Vikings, one team that could be a surprise in the Packers and the Lions, who seem to constantly be rebuilding. The best thing going for this division is the level of intensity present every time any of these two teams meet.

### 8. NFC West

Yes, the Seahawks got all the way to the Super Bowl last season, but after that there isn't much. The Rams could make a push this year, but they're still a year or two away. The Cardinals could surprise as well, but they've been perennial disappointments, and the 49ers need time to restock their roster with talent, so they're not going anywhere anytime soon. There are intense rivalries in the division, however, and football tickets are always hard to find for a Seahawks – Rams game.

Written by Jay Nault sponsored by

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